

First Rural Health Town Hall Meeting Takes Place in La Grande

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) and its advisory body, the Rural Health Coordinating Council (RHCC), are co-sponsoring Rural Health Town Hall Meetings around the state this summer. The meetings are a conversation among rural Oregonians, members of the RHCC and the staff of ORH. "We want to make sure we're in touch with rural Oregonians. We need to know what is on their minds, so that we can incorporate that information as we plan the Office's activities," said Scott Ekblad, Director of the Office of Rural Health (ORH).

The first meeting took place in La Grande on Thursday, June 16, 2005. Local consumers, health care workers, EMTs, volunteers, caregivers, veterans, public health workers, mental health providers, public officials and other concerned citizens from the community showed up and shared their opinions on the local health issues important to them. "I was very encouraged by the turnout," reported Ekblad. "We had no idea of what to expect, and I was thrilled with the number of people who attended and the variety of concerns they expressed. I learned a great deal from them."

The attendees talked for two hours with RHCC and ORH representatives about their concerns for the future of health care in Northeastern Oregon. Many participants felt that the biggest threats to healthcare in the region included access to, availability of,

and payment for quality health care services. Some noted that declining Medicare and other insurance payments have a serious impact on the ability to attract and retain health care providers. The increasing need to have specialists available in the community was emphasized as well. A veteran's advocate pointed out that returning servicemen are covered by a health plan that pays so poorly that it is difficult to find a provider who will take them. Many have to travel many miles to get care.

The high costs of medical insurance for individuals, and the increasing number of those who are uninsured, worried many of the participants at the meeting. How these two issues affect the community as a whole was discussed. Many noted that methamphetamine abuse, the lack of funds to address the issue and the lack of programs for treatment is a growing rural concern. One participant spoke with trepidation about the pending reduction of acute care mental health beds at a Pendleton facility. "This facility has trained psych staff and, if these beds close, the patients will be sent to Portland, or out of state. Or they will end up in a facility with inadequately trained staff for the patient population, and those higher skilled jobs will be lost."

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Community Representative New To RHCC

The Rural Health Coordination Council's (RHCC) newest member represents the community of Shady Cove, Oregon. "It's a wonderful place to live," says newly appointed member Matthew Morey, Ph.D. B.Pharm.

Dr. Morey is originally from the Bay Area in California. He received his PhD in Organic Chemistry from the University of California before moving to North Carolina. While Dr. Morey worked as research chemist his wife, Carla Morey, earned her Physician Assistant degree at Duke University in Durham. "After being a chemist for some years, we moved to Pullman, Washington. There I attended Washington State University and completed a degree in pharmacy," said Dr. Morey.

The Moreys moved to Shady Cove in 1993. Providence Medford Medical Group had recruited Ms. Morey, PA, to the underserved area to assist in increasing access to healthcare for community residents. Dr. Morey became the sole pharmacist in Eagle Point, a community twelve miles down the road from Shady Cove. "It was the only pharmacy opportunity near by and for the Eagle Point community it was the only point of access to prescriptions," said Dr. Morey, "My local practice had me dealing day to day with the health care frustrations of the local populace."

Dr. Morey's interest in being a member of the RHCC also stems from his involvement as Secretary of the Board for the Upper Rogue Community Center (URCC) in Shady Cove. "Most of the URCC members are elderly [and] have a vested interest in the quality of local care," said Morey. The active

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People made encouraging observations, as well. La Grande is fortunate to have Eastern Oregon University, with its OHSU School of Nursing programs and the Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center. Local residents see these programs' contributions to the community in the form of well-trained health care professionals. People trained in a local community are much more likely to stay there to practice. Some also mentioned



Town Hall attendees had a chance to network before the meeting.

successful

programs that, while currently inactive due to cuts in funding, can be reinstated if other sources of funding are found. The people in this area of the state are ready and able to help their neighbors.

"The first Rural Health Town Hall Meeting was very successful," commented Ekblad. "It was great to hear the community's thoughts about health care, and to see how their needs will determine ORH's strategic plan for the future."



Community members learned about the Office of Rural Health

The next Rural Health Town Hall Meeting is Wednesday, July 20, 2005 at the Auditorium at Lincoln Junior High School, 550 N Court St., in Burns. Information is available on the ORH web site at www.ohsu.edu/oregonruralhealth/ruraltown_burns.pdf. Town Hall Meetings are scheduled for August 11, 2005 in Roseburg and September 1, 2005 in Astoria. If you are unable to attend a Rural Health Town Hall Meeting, please feel free to use our comment form at www.ohsu.edu/oregonruralhealth/townhall.html to let us know about the issues on your mind.

Staff Changes At The Office Of Rural Health

Karen Whitaker Knapp, OHSU Vice Provost for Rural Health, Director of the OHSU Center for Rural Health, and Director of the Oregon Office of Rural Health since 1990, has announced that she will retire in January 2006. In preparation for that transition, Scott Ekblad, former Deputy Director of the Office of Rural Health, has been named Director of the Oregon Office of Rural Health and Deputy Director of the OHSU Center for Rural Health.

Paul McGinnis, former Director of Field Services in the Office of Rural Health, is now working with the Oregon Rural Practice-based Research Network (ORPRN) here at OHSU. Paul is providing technical assistance to the practices and communities that are part of ORPRN. Troy Soenen of our Field Services staff has accepted the position of Director of Field Services.

Sandra Assasnik, former Community Grants Coordinator, has taken a position coordinating rural health efforts at the Marion County Health Department.

Kate Clemens, former Technical Assistance Field Specialist, recently gave birth to a baby boy, and she and her husband have decided to move to Seattle. We will begin recruiting for both Sandra's and Kate's positions immediately.

Caleb Minnieweather was promoted to the position of Administrative Assistant, and will continue to be the friendly voice answering your phone calls to the Office of Rural Health.

Karen's departure will be a loss to all who have worked with her, and we are thankful that she will remain for nearly another year to ensure a smooth transition. We reluctantly join her in celebrating this milestone in her life. Fortunately, most of the other staff continues to work in the field of rural health. We congratulate Scott, Paul, Troy, Sandra and Caleb on their career transitions and wish them all success in their new positions. We congratulate Kate on her new baby, and wish she and her husband the best in their new life in Seattle.

Visit the Office of Rural Health web site for updated staff information, www.ohsu.edu/oregonruralhealth/staff.html.



Scott Ekblad, Director, Office of Rural Health listens to concerns about health care in the La Grande area.

Hot Topics – The Cliff Notes® Version

Plan to attend the Oregon Rural Health Conference? Got 15 minutes on Friday afternoon?

Doesn't it seem like there's always something you wish had been discussed at a conference, but wasn't? Or maybe you have an idea you'd like to voice but the opportunity never quite presents itself. Well here's your chance! This year the annual Rural Health conference will include a one-hour session composed of four 15-minute presentations on topics/ideas/suggestions that need to be heard. The Office of Rural Health is accepting requests from individuals to discuss a hot topic of their choice for 15 minutes. Send your topic idea in paragraph form (100 words maximum, please) to Sonya Howk, howks@ohsu.edu or via fax at 503-494-4798 before September 2, 2005.

Topics will be chosen and attendees notified by September 6, 2005. Hot Topics – The Cliff Notes® Version session will be held from 3:15 – 4:15 p.m. on Friday, November 4, 2005.

We would also like to invite you to lead a roundtable discussion on Saturday, November 5, 2005 at 7:00 a.m., whether you are part of the Hot Topics session or not. Just let us know what topic you would like discussed.

The small print: unfortunately, we cannot offer any kind of reimbursement or compensation for attendees who wish to present a hot topic. We just know that many attendees have great ideas that never get heard, and we want to hear them!

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community center provides diverse programs for youths and seniors. It also boasts a transportation program for residents with a 50-mile radius of Shady Cove. The five vans run all the time, taking seniors to local medical appointments, to run errands, or to Medford, 20 minutes away. As part of the board, Dr. Morey is responsible for securing grant funds to pay the van drivers.

Dr. Morey has experienced rural health from another perspective as well. A degenerative disease, similar to Multiple Sclerosis, has left him disabled. "As a disabled person, I am acutely aware of the needs of the less-abled in rural areas," said Dr. Morey. He hopes to bring attention to this issue, as well as addressing the issue of disparate reimbursement. "The level of reimbursement for rural family practice providers should be equal to those in urban areas," said Morey, "this is one our most important issues."

The next RHCC meeting will be held Thursday, July 21, 2005 in Burns. For more information on the meeting contact Caleb Minniweather at 503-494-4450.

Oregon Rural Health Conference Awards

Do you know people who deserve recognition for their contributions to the health of rural Oregonians? Nominate them for one of the following Oregon Rural Health Conference Awards (ORHCAs)!

The ORHCAs will be presented at the 22nd Annual Oregon Rural Health Conference on Friday, November 4, 2005 in Sunriver, Oregon.

- Rural Health Practitioner of the Year
- The Dutch Reinschmidt Award for Outstanding Achievement in Rural Health Education
- Outstanding Rural Health Practice
- Outstanding Contribution to Rural Health in Oregon
- Outstanding Rural Health Program
- Outstanding Clinic Administrator, Manager or Staff Support
- Outstanding Achievement in Community Education

For more information about award criteria and to access nomination forms, visit the ORH website, www.ohsu.edu/oregonruralhealth/conf.html, or call 503-494-4450, or toll-free 1-866-674-4376. The deadline for nomination forms is August 31, 2005.

Oregon Rural Health Clinic Workshops

The Office of Rural Health is facilitating two Oregon Rural Health Clinic Workshops this September. This workshop will replace the RHC day at the Annual Office of Rural Health Conference. Cost report tips, the Medicare Modernization Act and compliance plans are among the topics included. The first workshop will be held Thursday, September 15 in La Grande. The second is Friday, September 16 in Newport.

Registration for the workshops is at www.ohsu.edu/oregonruralhealth/rhc_workshop_reg.pdf. **Please register by Friday, August 5, 2005.** Cost is \$40 per person. For more information contact Troy Soenen, soenent@ohsu.edu, or toll free at 866-674-4376.

TRAINING & CONFERENCE INFO

August 11, 2005

Rural Health Town Hall Meeting
The Chateau Event Centre
Caleb Minnieweather, minniewc@ohsu.edu or call (503) 494-4450

September 1, 2005

Rural Health Town Hall Meeting
Holiday Inn Express
Caleb Minnieweather, minniewc@ohsu.edu or call (503) 494-4450

September 15, 2005

Oregon Rural Health Clinic Workshop
Eastern Oregon University, Room 309 Hoke Building
Troy Soenen, soenent@ohsu.edu, or call (503) 494-4450

September 16, 2005

Oregon Rural Health Clinic Workshop
Best Western Agate Beach Inn, Agate Ballroom
Troy Soenen, soenent@ohsu.edu, or call (503) 494-4450

**The Office of Rural Health
would like to hear from you!**

Call us at:
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